



**MARYLAND DEPARTMENT OF HUMAN RESOURCES**  
*Maryland's Social Services Agency*



**MEDIA RELEASE**

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**DHR USHERS IN NATIONAL ADOPTION AWARENESS MONTH BY  
APPLAUDING FAMILIES FROM THE LOWER EASTERN SHORE**

*Dorchester, Somerset, Wicomico and Worcester Counties name families of the year*

**BALTIMORE** – The Maryland Department of Human Resources (DHR) got a head start on celebrating National Adoption Awareness month by honoring families from **Dorchester, Somerset, Wicomico and Worcester Counties** that contributed to the **770 total adoptions** finalized during fiscal year 2009.

“We have much to celebrate,” said DHR Secretary Brenda Donald. We have seen a 15 percent reduction in the overall number of children in foster care; a 43 percent decline in group home placements; we have recruited 1,500 new foster parents since 2007; and we found families for 770 children during our last fiscal year.”

The successes Donald highlighted were driven by the Department’s **Place Matters** initiative. This initiative builds on the premise that nothing matters more to a child than a place to call home.

Each of the local departments of social services honored families from their jurisdiction that adopted during the last year. These families were recognized for their commitment to adoption, their support of the agency’s goals, and their efforts to produce the best possible outcomes for children. Lower Eastern Shore jurisdictions honored the following families:

**Dorchester County Department of Social Services** recognized **Glenda and Joseph Smith**

Glenda and Joseph Smith are the adoptive parents of five children – some of whom have complex medical needs. Two of their four adoptive children are siblings who were placed in the Smith home as a foster care placement when they were five months and three years old respectively. Mr. and Mrs. Smith have provided the children in their home with a loving and nurturing environment, and they are thriving.

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**Somerset County Department of Social Services** recognized **Cherry and Jonathan Conley.**

The Conleys always knew they would add a child to their family through adoption. They have three biological children and also provide respite care to other foster children. They adopted Angela and have been wonderful education advocates for her. Angela's future is brighter due to the educational support they have given her and their expectations that she be the best she can be. The Conleys have helped Angela research her biological family's history and have supported her new relationships with siblings. They are considering adopting another child in the near future.

**Wicomico County Department of Social Services** recognized **Scott and Amy Ness.**

Scott and Amy Ness became foster parents in 2005. They have four biological children and had a strong desire to open their home to others – a lot of others! In October 2006, they received their first call and accepted into their home twin infants, Chad and Brad. The Ness family later became involved with the twins' five older siblings and adopted them all! Since then, they adopted three other siblings as well! The children are given guidance, support and healthy boundaries, but they are also given a voice, a home, acceptance and a place in the Ness family.

**Worcester County Department of Social Services** recognized **Augustine Cook.**

In 2009, Ms. Cook became the forever family to a ten year old boy who had been viciously attacked by dogs. The attack forever changed his life as it left him vision-impaired, severely scarred and emotionally damaged. Ms. Cook recognized the heart and soul of this young boy. She was already a parent and knew she had more love to provide. Knowing the challenges ahead for this young boy, she opened her heart and home to provide him with the love and nurturing he needed to thrive. Their relationship has flourished and he has made tremendous strides towards having a happy and stable future.

The celebration for the families was held at the Baltimore Zoo's Mansion House. In addition to an awards luncheon for their contributions, the families were also treated to an afternoon at the zoo with their children. "This is our 13<sup>th</sup> year of celebrating adoptions with an awards luncheon, but our families will tell you the biggest reward for them was being able to add these wonderful children to their families," Donald stated.

Additional information about this year's honorees can be found by visiting the DHR newsroom at [www.dhr.state.md.us](http://www.dhr.state.md.us) and clicking on the "Newsroom" tab on the left side of the page.

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**The 2009 Families of the Year from jurisdictions across the state include:**

Allegany County	Eugene and Jeanne Miller
Anne Arundel County	Mark and Lisa Walinski
Baltimore City	Donald and Arnissa Ames Brandi Beckner Jim and Julia Forest Avan Howard Mark and Judy Schlothauer
Baltimore County	Jason and Donna Neidinger
Calvert County	Jerry-y and Mary Lee
Caroline County	Ron and Vicky Marquess
Carroll County	Marshall and Chrissie Thompson
Cecil County	Rick and Marianne Shull
Charles County	Lionel and Shelia Carroll
Dorchester County	Joseph and Glenda Smith
Frederick County	Douglas and Maureen Garlock
Garrett County	Danny and Barbara Baker
Harford County	Robert and Yvonne Cossey
Howard County	Deirdre Henderson
Montgomery County	Charlie and Jenni Weller
Prince George's County	Darla Sligh
Queen Anne's County	Mark and Darla Verdonck
St. Mary's County	Gary and Vickie Ferko
Somerset County	Jonathan and Cherry Conley
Talbot County	Deborah Fletcher
Washington County	Tom and Toni Barnhart
Wicomico County	Scott and Amy Ness
Worcester County	Augustine Cook

The Maryland Department of Human Resources is the state's social service provider. The agency collaborates with 24 local jurisdictions to: provide foster care, adoption and protective services to children; collect and distribute child support payments; and provide temporary cash, food stamps and medical assistance to families. It also funds programs for homeless persons, refugees, migrant workers, victims of crime and women who are displaced, battered or assaulted. Last year, DHR served 638,000 people in need. In terms of its annual budget, DHR is Maryland's fourth largest state agency.

- Martin O'Malley, Governor
- Anthony G. Brown, Lt. Governor
- Brenda Donald, Secretary